

# Leaving Freely

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Summary: Valvatorez receives a letter of complaint about some Prinnies sent up to work from Hades and Fenrich attempts to use the situation to draw Valvatorez away from his job as a Prinny Instructor. [Warnings: one shot, takes place before the events of D4, Valfen]

## Leaving Freely

There existed no demon better for this job. Not a single demon could match him in manners, refinement and general graceâ€”or at least these were Fenrich's thoughts on his dear lord's current undertaking. While training Prinnies was not the most refined and graceful work in itself, Valvatorez made it look that way. For the filthy pit that Hades was, Valvatorez did bring it some sense of class. All these thoughts helped Fenrich through the day to day. In truth no amount of shining up or talking up this place and job would make it worthy for his lord, but try he would. Valvatorez spoke so highly of it at least.

Fenrich forever remained loyal to Valvatorez and yet he did still yearn for the chance to see him so powerful and unstoppable once again. There were days Fenrich could settle for at least some shift in this schedule of Prinnies and teaching endlessly. His wish came true on the day they received a letter of feedback. It certainly put a bump in the usual, but perhaps not in the way he had dreamed of.

Valvatorez paced the room with the letter in his handâ€”seemingly lost in his thoughts. It was a troubling letter indeed. Fenrich had peeked at itâ€”for his lord's good of courseâ€”but he couldn't avoid giving it to him altogether. He had half a mind to make his way up out of Hades and strangle the sender; however, he could not tolerate such a long absence from his charge. So the letter made it to Valvatorez, putting an unpleasant look on his face.

"This is not possible. It isn't right...My Prinnies? Poorly behaved? They couldn't have been trained by me and yet this time and place seems to match a shipment," Valvatorez said as his pacing came to a halt.

"We don't have any reason to trust the word of such a demon, my lord," Fenrich attempted to supply. He'd looked into it of course—the letter wasn't entirely truthful. Portions of the shipment confirmation looked fake and likely weren't in Valvatorez's time, but that news flew over Val's head when Fenrich tried to say so upfront.

"No, Fenrich. No one has any reason to lie about simple Prinnies. If they were not good enough, this is my own failing and I will see them re-trained personally."

Fenrich paused at that, considering the meaning briefly. He soon bowed his head. "Then I'll request the Prinnies be returned to us immediately."

Valvatorez's response swiftly stirred Fenrich into straightening up. It was something he'd longed to hear—one way or another.

"Unacceptable! We're going above Hades ourselves. This client has a very important event to host and requires the retraining immediately. I can correct this mistake right away. No Prinny of mine will falter in such a critical moment."

This demon was an asshole, but Fenrich thought if for just a second he felt a little bit grateful for this jerk's demanding existence. Now if he could just spur Valvatorez into staying out of Hades—the thought got the werewolf's gears turning. He could work fast.

"I'll get everything we might require packed and ready to leave the second you're ready, my lord."

"Of course. I'll be prepared within a few minutes."

"As you wish. All is for my lord."

With those important words spoken, Fenrich bowed and took off to do as he agreed. Along with setting up a few things to make this little visit last much, much longer. He nearly considered saying his goodbye to this pit; however, deemed it a waste of effort and thought. His lord came first and foremost—even in simple tasks like ensuring they would have the daily items they might require in such a trip.

Efficient as he was, Fenrich didn't take very long before he was standing before his lord and ready to go. Valvatorez turned from his focus the state of his quarters—perfectly clean as always—but it did feel strange to be leaving.

"Fenrich, I know I do not have to tell you this, but we can't be away for long. There are more Prinnies arriving by the day. I'll need to be back as soon as possible so we do not fall behind."

Fenrich tipped into a small, polite bow. "Of course, my lord. Should anything cause you any trouble, I'll dispatch them myself."

The smallest smile appeared on Valvatorez's lips. "Ever reliable, Fenrich. I'll do my part as well in keeping us both safe. Although it's a short trip. There should be no trouble."

Fenrich only smiled and straightened back up. He knew exactly what sort of trip this was supposed to be—"provided everything went as planned. He could accept plans A through Z at this point; he had enough of them in place. Any one of them had to be better than staying in this pit.

"All is for my lord," Fenrich said before the pair headed off—"a few choice Prinnies in tow behind them. These ones were products of the vampire's instruction; they could be counted on to a certain point. Fenrich at least had figured out how to manipulate them. Staring them down usually was enough however.

What he needed those criminals for he could worry about later. For now he followed his lord's lead on the way out. Provided his plan went perfectly, they would be enjoying the heights of power on the surface again in no time.

As it tended to go with these things, the start was a rocky one. They managed to make it out of the worst of Hades, but Valvatorez being himself was distracted by at least two other plights on their way to the castle. They were sorted out with punching Fenrich found. It didn't make him happy, but he did see it through. That Valvatorez could still function in combat was a good sign at least—"Fenrich accepted that in consolation. Even if it did leave him fretting the bumps and scrapes, he thanked their luck.

Small troubles aside, the pair managed to make it to the demon's castle in one piece. Valvatorez looked fair upward at the tall reaches of the angular and cold looking walls. For the Netherworld, it was fairly standard. Fenrich doubted any engagement in this place was actually of any importance. He wasn't going to argue. Valvatorez set his mind on this—"there was no stopping him until the deed was actually done.

Valvatorez's thoughts were mostly filled with various ways to try and make things up to this demon; although perhaps he might have looked as though he were contemplating the distance between the height of the doorknocker and his reach. It was far. Fenrich stepped in and knocked for him. He finally snapped out of his thoughts and turned attentive again. Valvatorez opened his mouth to give Fenrich some kind of acknowledgment when the door swung open. Behind the massive wooden door stood a demon of some grace—"a ghostly creature that spoke with something of an odd tone, like it was some kind of act. Fenrich spotted he was not well trained right away.

"I take it you are our Prinny instructor? We've been expecting you for a little while now."

"Pardon me, but it is something of a trip up from Hades. It couldn't be done half-heartedly."

"Different from your instruction of Prinnies however? No matter...you'll simply have to correct it now," the ghost butler said before sailing through the air to allow the two to walk through. Fenrich already felt ready to let this fool have it. How dare he speak that way to his lord? And to his face as well! Valvatorez

perhaps sensing that tension in his steward simply moved on after the butlerâ€"casually and unbothered.

Fenrich held back for now as they were lead through the palace. It was standard fare for the Netherworld inside as wellâ€"except a bit flashier for the sake of the event the next day. If demons weren't showing off strength they were flashing their valuables for any audience that would come along. When food and wine were flowing, plenty of guests would likely bother. Even if this demon was a rude nobody, somebody would show. Fenrich certainly recalled this bastard that way at least. Things shifted here and there since their time in Hades however. He planned around that as well.

The ghostly butler took them through the areas usually reserved for staff and Prinnies so they would know what was going on. The tour didn't come with a single hint of joy in this. Fenrich picked out the way he was talking down but held back. It was only for his lord's sake after all.

Their trip ended in the large room the party and event was to take place in that stood adjacent to the throne. A mockery, was all Fenrich could think of it. This demon was no overlordâ€"nothing compared to Valvatorez in his Tyrant days.

Just as Valvatorez was going to call for the Prinnies to be brought forth an interruption came from that joke of a throne room. None other than the lord of the palace came forwardâ€"decked in dark sparkling armor. The lord grinned when he spotted the pair with his butler. "So the help is finally here? Your sense of urgency isn't very good you know. Your trash has to be presentable in a day."

"I am the greatest Prinny instructor in any Netherworld, I assure you. It will be done," Valvatorez answered firmly. His confidence was unwaveringâ€"it usually was in these matters.

"Lord Gunnar will see you further shamed and struck deeper into the pit of the Netherworld if you cannot do it," the spirit butler adds in with a hint of glee in his voice.

The anger swelling up in Fenrich could be felt across the room. His hair started to stand up on endâ€"he looked every bit ready to attack, but just as he opened his mouth Valvatorez stood up straight and flared his cape out in front of him. "I said it will be done; I've given you my word. Now I would like to get to work right away. Have the Prinnies gather here immediately."

The butler and lord exchanged brief looks before the ghost did as requested and went to have the Prinnies called to the large room. Fenrich cooled slightly, but the intensity of his glare hadn't died down just yet. Gunnar didn't seem bothered by it. Either he was a good actor or stronger than his ridiculous armor let on.

The lord of the palace swept back a few loose strands of hair, flashing bejeweled gauntlets in the process. He grinned with perfectly sparkling teeth. Fenrich hated his face.

"It's Valvatorez then, isn't it? I wonder if you have any relation to the Tyrant," Gunnar said while practically oozing with smugness.

"I am just a Prinny Instructor. And I'd rather like to see this

corrected soon. There are Prinnies waiting for me in Hades."

Valvatorez completely missing when people were talking down at him was one of his many formidable powers, Fenrich noted. Although it stood to be a terribly frustrating power. One among many.

"Regardless of whoever caused this my lord will see this adjusted without issue," Fenrich supplied to assist him. Gunnar did not look impressed but at least he let the other subject go. The much bigger demon looked down at Valvatorez for a moment before grinning once more.

"See to it that you do. You won't see a single Hell for fixing something that should have been dealt with far before I received these useless souls."

Valvatorez spoke before Fenrich could bark out his reply. "It should have been dealt with beforeâ€"you are correct. I expected nothing from you beyond the time and space to see this done."

Gunnar tilted his head back to look further down on him and then turned to leave. "I don't have much patience or time for you, but do try to keep your word. Useless things are terminated around here."

With good time, the Prinnies had been rounded up and all filed into the large room. The ghost butler took off after his masterâ€"the two heading to the upper floor likely to plot. Fenrich kept an eye on them until they were out of sight. His plans might have to sit back for a little while so he could deal with those two.

Ever observant, Valvatorez surely sensed Fenrich's planning and gave him an appreciative smile. "I may well need your assistance with this lot, Fenrich. It is good to have you at my side."

Fenrich fumbled for a momentâ€"flustered at the powerful combination of a smile and praise. "Of course my lord! Wherever you go, I will follow you."

Satisfied with that answer Valvatorez nodded and returned his attention to the Prinnies before them. They were not even properly lined up. "Attention, all of you. I'm not sure where you went wrong on your path, but I am here to set you right. I accept nothing short of perfection. You all have a major duty to fill tomorrowâ€"even a single screw up will have you sent down to Hades for a full re-education."

The phrase "re-education" was a powerful oneâ€"it sent these fools shaking in an instant. Fenrich had to admit Valvatorez knew how to get even the laziest Prinny motivated. And even if Valvatorez couldn't do it Fenrich had a few tricks of his own. He would not have his lord shamed and disgraced any furtherâ€"especially not by that fat-headed fop Gunnar.

A smaller re-educating started right there in the hall. These souls had no motivationâ€"Fenrich had to guess they were poorly trained from the start and perhaps in a slump of some kind. Gunnar was perhaps not a terrifying enough lord to keep them in order. They

weren't quite to the level of mutiny just yet; however, he guessed it wouldn't have been too far. He wanted to suss out some kind of explanation for their poor behavior suddenly being a problem, but so far there was nothing beyond that. His best guess was the problem weighed less on the Prinnies and more on their lord.

Every so often Gunnar would peer over the banister from above and judge Valvatorez's work. Not that the demon would even be a very good judge of such a thing.

Within a few hours Valvatorez already his crew whipped into better shape. They took instruction better and followed orders almost all the way through. Following through and finishing seemed to be the issue, but Valvatorez was on top of it. With a bit of pushing later into the night Fenrich felt confident these souls would be in presentable shape for whatever this function was. Strutting around and showing off that ugly armor likely.

With a few more hours of instruction Valvatorez was looking ready to pack upâ€"the lot had improved significantly and it was getting late. He would drill them again in the morning and surely that would be enough. Lord and steward were just discussing requesting a place to rest from Gunnar so they might do so when a heavy crash sounded through the castle. Without a word Valvatorez charged toward troubleâ€"Fenrich right beside him. When they reached the upper floor they found a door knocked open by heavy force and within the storeroom a Prinny crashed amid broken and damaged sets of armor. Sure enough the lord of the castle was there with them in an instantâ€"gasping quite loudly at the sight.

"I thought these idiots were being fixedâ€"look at this one! Breaking into my armory and destroying all of this!" Gunnar exclaimed. His butler appeared shortly after and joined in the gasping.

"What happened to being the best Prinny instructor?!"

Valvatorez's shoulders tensed and he marched toward the Prinny still sprawled out on the floor. "This must be some sort of mistake," he muttered. Fenrich slipped silently aside to inspect the door while the others were distracted with Valvatorez. Something about all this was fishy. Deliberate. He noted the way the door had been sealedâ€"no ordinary Prinny would have been able to undo something so complex. And yet the door was charred with blast marks. There was no way someone like Gunnar would have left this unlocked. And if it were, why would anyone take the time to blast it? Why not waltz in? He stepped into the room with the others.

Valvatorez helped the Prinny up and inspected the creature for damage or anything strange.

"I-I didn't do it, dood," they insisted. Valvatorez's eyes narrowed as he went into deeper thought. Fenrich felt anxious knowing what would undoubtedly follow.

"I understand. But I have made a promise. I will still be sending you to Hades. It is the safer bet at this point," Valvatorez replied firmly. Whether he believed the soul or not he didn't make clear. He'd taken up his poker faceâ€"a look he turned toward Gunnar and his aid. "This one will be properly re-educated. In the meantime, one of my recent graduates will fill for them. Rest easy."

"Rest easy? That's not even half of my problem. Look at my armory! This all cost more Hell than you've seen in your lifetime," Gunnar said, gritting his teeth and clenching his fists. Fenrich wondered why this fellow hadn't gone into acting yet. He wasn't getting a break through here.

"It is unfortunate, but I'm in no place to compensate for such an incident," Valvatorez answered with the same sternness he gave the Prinny.

Gunnar took offense so fast it was like he'd been storing it up for the occasion. "An incident? This is a crime!"

"Truly unfortunate," Valvatorez repeatedâ€"tone remaining.

Fenrich took to stand at his side, unable to hold back a grin. "How terrible for you. Our condolences, truly. But you will find on your receipt for when you ordered your Prinnies that you signed an agreement saying you will not hold the instructor or any future instructors liable for any Prinny-related damages. Unless of course you modified those documents too."

"My sympathies, however, are all your's," Valvatorez offered instead. He sent the Prinny along toward Hades and managed to keep the same impressively calm expression. "For now, I'll complete the task you asked for. Fenrich and I will be retiring for the evening to wake early and ensure your event runs to perfection."

Gunnar held onto some small sense of control. He shookâ€"actually angry this time. They might have been playing each other but Fenrich could see the humiliation hanging off his overly armored sparkling shoulders. The lowly Prinny instructor still had some fangs after all.

"Do your job properly tomorrow, instructor, I'll see to it you never leave Hades again," Gunnar said nearly in a hiss. He glanced down at his butler. "The back room. I don't want to hear a damn thing."

The ghost butler led the way out of the room, waiting for the two to follow so his lord could likely go have a fit in his quarters. The pair followed the ghost down to the bottom floor to a small, dusty room. That it was untouched in all this time was not surprising. Gunnar couldn't even seem to keep a few Prinnies in line enough to do the cleaning.

Once Valvatorez and Fenrich were within, the butler shut the door behind them. Fenrich let out a sigh after a few moments of silence. "My lord, you've known this entire time, haven't you?"

He did not answer immediatelyâ€"words selected carefully. "I won't allow any demon to tarnish my record for any reason. Lies or no, I will see this through."

"He means to set you up for failure."

"Well then Fenrich, I will simply have to succeed instead."

Fenrich could dial his reaction back only so much. "That is incredible my lord! Naturally, with your endless skills you will

simply out-play this fool. There's never a reason to doubt your wits, but as a precaution, I will be watching your backâ€"as always."

Valvatorez smiled the werewolf's way. "You are a most reliable and fantastic demon, Fenrich. Do however you pleaseâ€"I know you'll do what is best."

The praise sent Fenrich's mood all the way up to the moon. He would deny it, but his tail wagged just a little. "Without fail! All is for my lord," Fenrich said in half a blurt before getting himself in control with a small bow.

Valvatorez relaxed with at those words, turning to the room. "We're settled then. We should see about getting some rest."

"Hold on, my lord. Allow me to clean up this filth for you," Fenrich interjected and rushed to the bed to start dusting up. Seeing the state of things he moved to the window and opened it up to start chasing dust out. "You may want to step out for a momentâ€"I'll have this acceptable in a minute."

"You hardly need to make such an effortâ€" "

"You deserve better, my lord, but I will make this less insulting," Fenrich said. He made it clear in his tone he would not accept any other ending for the night. Valvatorez knew better than to argue with him when he got like this.

"Very well...I will step out."

Once the door was shut behind Valvatorez, Fenrich flew into his work. He couldn't polish this dirty little room into a gem, but it was almost satisfactory when he was done a few minutes later. He invited Valvatorez back inside who looked a bit awestruck. In such a short time most of the dust was cleared and furniture appeared less likely to break under anyone who got on top of it.

"Brilliant work, Fenrich. You do more for me than you should ever need to, but I'll rest easily tonight thanks to your efforts," Valvatorez said as he moved toward the chair. Fenrich very gently redirected him toward the bed. He didn't argue.

The smaller demon sat at the edge of the bed with Fenrich's guidanceâ€"not bothered by it at this point. "Rest, my lord. We'll need to be ready for more tricks tomorrow."

With a little more silent urging Valvatorez laid down on his side, bundling up in his cloak. "I will be prepared regardless. Wake me early."

"As you wish, my lord."

A short silence settled between them. Fenrich waited a moment before going to sit in the chair closer to the door. For safety's sake, surely that was the best plan. Somehow Valvatorez looked much smaller and a little lonely across the empty space. Perhaps it was Fenrich's head playing with him.

Valvatorez remained quiet for a moment before speaking up quietly.

"Fenrich?"

"Yes, my lord?"

Another pause.

"The sardines that we had this morning got me thinking about something."

If it wasn't about finally switching back to blood Fenrich didn't want to hear it. But he would endure it for his lord. "About what...?"

"I hadn't known it, but there are many uses for sardines besides eating. Not that I would like to do anything besides eat them, but they are so multi-purpose. What a useful creature."

Fenrich let out a slow sigh. "Lord Val...as fascinating as the idea is and as great and impressive as your knowledge always is, if you begin now you will never sleep tonight. You'll work yourself up again."

Valvatorez fell silent once again; closing his eyes after some thought. "You're right, Fenrich. There is too much to do tomorrow to sacrifice sleep. Even if for sardines."

A mortal might have praised their god while in Fenrich's position. Endlessly wonderful as his lord was, Valvatorez could get a bit too into his speeches. Especially on that particular topic. A crisis averted, in short.

They traded a soft "goodnight" each before the room truly remained quiet. Fenrich wondered if Valvatorez had paced himself properly that day. Hopefully he would be in renewed strength the next day. If it took damn sardines, so be it. He'd prepared for that situation as well. Worries and plans mingled together as he kept on guardâ€"listening to outside the room for anything strange. He couldn't trust this Gunnar bastard for a second. Hopefully he knew better than to start something.

Fenrich sank deeper into his chair and dozed for a few hours. He did not wear out in the way Valvatorez did at times. Not that he could tell his lord so. Everything was ignored or denied in one way or another. Perhaps there was nothing else that could be done.

No.

Fenrich refused the thought, once again tapping into his plans for this crappy little event. He'd even things out with Gunnar and have his beloved tyrant back in one swoop surely.

As requested, Fenrich woke Valvatorez early. He was very briefly groggy before he got up and started on about their plan of attack for the day. The plan stood little chance of going as intended. With all the forces pushing against them Fenrich already had a secondary plan running underneath this one. They were not going to survive the morning without Gunnar and his crony making a move.

None of that stopped Valvatorez from dusting himself off and charging

right into what he deemed to be the best plan of action. He would call the Prinnies forward and begin restraining them once more with specifics of this event in mindâ€"not that they had this information. It was guesswork. Despite his lord's excellent manner of speaking and carrying himself, he'd never been so social as to attend many parties in his younger days. He'd been more prone to casually crashing themâ€"one of the wonderful images Fenrich retained of his ever-powerful lord. His grace, his murderous intent, the seriousness in his crimson eyes...

Fenrich stopped and made himself focus on the bunch of Prinnies lined up orderly before them in the event hall. Valvatorez took to handing out likely duties and coaching on not getting tossed in the middle of conversations (for the record: shutting up). He even coached on the elegant art of eavesdropping for the lordâ€"an endlessly important task of course. It was a touch frustrating that he was so good at this terrible job. Fenrich remained both impressed and annoyed.

For his dear lord he could weather it. He jumped in to assist as he was neededâ€"all while keeping an ear out for the missing demon lord and his thin-skinned butler. One of the two of them had to show eventually. He hoped for never.

It was while Valvatorez was in the middle of outfitting each Prinny with a classy bowtie for the evening that Gunnar finally came out. The demon still remained in his terrible armor but this time looked more openly pissed. "Every important demon in the Netherworld will be here in a few hours and you are playing dress up with the help?" he near spat at the pair from Hades.

Valvatorez remained unfazed. "We've run over everything I can imagine might come up at an event. Unless there is something specific you might need them training in."

Gunnar spitefully chucked a list at Valvatorez's face, but the list being paper mostly fluttered downward in front of him. Valvatorez simply grabbed it out of the air and casually read it over. "I'll see that everything is in order without fail. You needn't worry."

There was a huff out of the lord but he stormed off soon enough back to deal with his own issuesâ€"whatever they were. Fenrich leaned slightly over Valvatorez's shoulder to peer at this list. Immediately he saw the trouble brewing. They could manage, but it was going to be tight.

Valvatorez spoke first. "It seems I'll be needing your help, Fenrich. I don't like to trouble you, but this seems to be a handful."

"It's not a problem for me, my lord. For you, it is nothing."

There came a hum of understanding from the small vampire. "Of course. Reliable as ever, Fenrich. Now, let us procure everything from the lower levels first."

This was easily said but not easily accomplished. Below the castle where the final decorations were held was a complete den of traps and monsters. Between the two of them and the newly trained Prinnies they managed and hauled things up in a somewhat timely manner. The worst part about it remained in Fenrich's inability to act on many of his plans yet. There was just too much to do and he didn't much

appreciate being used for manual labor that was not for his own lord's good. This just pissed him off. He would do it "for Valvatorez and his desire" but it didn't please him a single shred.

By the time the castle set in order Fenrich felt that unpleasant urge to risk a plan that would kill Gunnar now instead of later. He knew better. The timing had to be perfect so he'd weather this longer.

Before too much more time, demons started filtering in and the Prinnies got to work serving them like it were any proper party. It seemed Gunnar needed to maintain some kind of high-class appearance in this to get any guests at all. Fenrich guessed he'd drink himself into oblivion otherwise. He seemed the type.

Demons in power with wealth made their way in "all trying to show off more than the last to enter. Fenrich noted each who entered" keeping an eye out for anyone that might become a problem for his lord. With luck none of them would challenge him to anything stupid. With even more luck, Valvatorez would make no terrible promises or give a single one of them his word.

As the guests filed in and Gunnar took to schmoozing along through them and showing off a problem appeared on Valvatorez's radar. There were never enough Prinnies to meet the need for refilling glasses and errands behind the scenes. Fenrich caught the look in his lord's eyes while they'd remained in back out of the way, but peeks outside said enough. Even the endless rush of the Prinnies working beyond human capacity was not enough. They were still too slow. A complaint would be coming from Gunnar soon "both could sense it."

"My lord, before you suggest anything..." Fenrich began, trailing off as Valvatorez turned his eyes up to him. There was a mutual understanding that clicked and despite this, Fenrich went on. He couldn't tell him no without finishing. "It's far below your station to go out there and assist."

"I said there would be no problems, I can't do nothing, Fenrich."

Of course he would say that. Fenrich already knew he'd go that way. He lets out a short sigh. "As your steward, I will handle it. Let me do the work, but keep an eye on that idiot Gunnar from a safe distance. I get the feeling he is up to something."

Valvatorez did not look entirely convinced. "You're endlessly reliable Fenrich, but the pile up outside is getting to be a bit much."

Both could hear a commotion starting to kick up. "If you see me as so endlessly reliable, let me prove it to you now, my lord. Keep an eye out," Fenrich reminded him and took off to another room. This left Valvatorez frozen in place and mostly puzzled until the werewolf returned "this time dressed like a butler proper" hair somewhat managed into a ponytail, his new clothes perfectly pressed with a neat waistcoat and tie. He was impressively professional "Valvatorez might have mistaken him for a career butler if he did not know the demon so closely. Arguing with such a convincing picture would be difficult. He didn't."

"As much as it's reasonable...I leave this to you, Fenrich. I am counting on you, as always," Valvatorez relented, dipping his head slightly. Fenrich felt a little pride in being able to keep his lord out of this mess. He could handle drinks and a few rowdy, stuck-up demons himself after all.

"I won't disappoint you, Lord Val. Do try to relax while I sort it out," Fenrich replied with a confident smile—"maybe closer to a little grin. With that he charged off into the event hall. Prinnies there were making rushed waddles from the wine, glasses and tables. That there was enough to go around was a surprise, but they were right in working out help was short in supply. Fenrich entered the fray with his usual efficiency—"pouring out wine and helping the Prinnies get trays balanced enough to carry along in greater quantities. It was all annoying, but if for keeping his lord out of this position he could put up with it—"whatever pride it burned.

Of course as soon as he was getting things in order Gunnar sidled along near the long table Fenrich stationed himself at.

"Something wrong with your Prinnies?" he asked shortly, giving Fenrich a knowing look over his current glass of wine. Who knew what number it was in the evening's sequence.

"Your work force is short for an event of this size. You should have ordered more...but considering it's too late, I'm filling in the gap for you. My lord said this party would go through—"I'm merely seeing it through on that guarantee. Shouldn't you be grovelling and thanking us for whipping your crew into this shape?" Fenrich grumbled, sending off another Prinny with a well stocked tray. They were working most effectively now—"no one would be able to deny they would be sufficient if there were enough of them.

Gunnar glanced Fenrich's way with a look that he could only describe as annoying and probably trouble. "I guess I do owe you for coming through, don't I?" With that the lord of the castle took off. Fenrich didn't trust it for a moment—"not even half a second. He kept an eye on the bastard as he could follow him between his work—"he was an excellent multi-tasker anyway. Gunnar conversed somewhat secretly with his ghostly butler and said butler went on toward where he knew Valvatorez was. His lord would be fine surely if it were just thanks being passed along. Then again when would a demon like this one even know gratitude?

Before he could free himself of his duties, a few minutes later Fenrich saw precisely one of his fears. Valvatorez stepped out from his safe place in the back rooms, following behind the ghostly butler. The last thing he needed was his lord finding a way to find a problem out here after he got everything in order. Fenrich charged from his spot around the wine, almost storming his way to Val's side. It was only when he was nearly on him that he realized Valvatorez was dressed for the party now instead of his regular outfit and cloak. The classy tuxedo pulled his focus away from the problem briefly. His dear lord looked so sharp and splendid...

He seemed honestly surprised when Fenrich stopped nearby. "Here you are. Excellent. We have everything sorted out now, you should relax and enjoy yourself some, Fenrich," he said casually as he might.

"My lord...should you really be out here?"

Valvatorez tilted his head aside very slightly. "I've been officially invited to join as thanks for our good work. Relax. It's fine. We'll return home as soon as things settle down," he replied somewhat soothingly as he went. A piece of Fenrich very much wished he could just relax. Then he could take a moment to appreciate how well the blue of his cravat suited him and how refined a tuxedo with tails made him appear. Frustratingly, Fenrich tossed all his pining aside for a brief moment to think logically.

"Why would that fool suddenly invite you in? This doesn't seem strange?"

Valvatorez did not hesitate to answer. He did not do so often. "Regardless of the reason, it would be rude to turn this down. Besides, I can keep an eye on things much better from out here. Would you have me look away from you now? I'll refuse."

Something about that set Fenrich on fire. He couldn't say no to this. "...My lord, if you insist. Your grace is too great for me to meet properly at times...Such brilliance...I'll trust in your judgement."

"Superb. Let us have a drink then, Fenrich," Valvatorez said with a smile this time. He seemed more than pleased with that reply despite the werewolf's obvious misgivings with this whole thing. He would not turn him down however. He started to lead the way back to the wine to take care of his desire when the smaller demon was approached by a few of the other partying demons. Perhaps they had surmised he was a guest from his dress. Perhaps from the confidence in his step? The air of elegance? Anything from Fenrich's long list of positives about his lord really.

However the list did not help much in the small demon being soon near surrounded by a round of bigger, noisy demons. They were all well worked over with alcohol.

"Who's this late visitor? I don't recognize him?"

"He seems somewhat familiar, I dunno."

"Small for a demon lord though. How ever did you get an invite?"

Valvatorez remained unfazed as always by the slew of questions and the circle around him. He opened his mouth to talk and Fenrich pushed through to grasp his hand. "My lord...An urgent matter if you would!"

"But it would be rude toâ€" "

Valvatorez was cut off by Fenrich's rush toward the wine, pulling along as he had to until his lord complied to join him in strides a bit too much for him to properly keep up with. "Fenrich please, this is too fast...!"

Fenrich stopped by the table, all prepared to chase off any followers if he had to. For the moment it was clear. He still looked ready to pounce.

"I don't have any clue what's gotten into you, but I was just fine."

The werewolf pause, pouring out a small glass of wine and gently eased it into Val's hands. "You requested a drink...I didn't want you to get caught up and forget...That is all, my lord. But do consider that Gunnar is watching you. Be careful with what you say and do...Please?"

He fell short of begging him. As fantastic as his lord was, he was far too honest for a demon. Once he began to run his mouth there was no telling what would come out and how awful it would be. For their pride's sake Fenrich needed to get them out as soon as possible with as little socializing as possible. The one time his plans were falling apart and of course it was here.

Valvatorez gave Fenrich a confident little smirk. "Don't worry like I'll start a fight. I know better than to ruin a party, Fenrich. I would never be so crude after I've been invited after all."

Fenrich had half a mind to throw Val over his shoulder and run now. He thought that might land him in less trouble somehow, but knew he could not. "I have no doubt that your company would be excellent in this setting, but I worry how these guests might react to your occupationâ€"or even your past one."

"That they are meeting the best in either? What worry is there? You trouble yourself over so many things my dear Fenrich. You needn't worry soâ€"especially over such a small matter. Regardless of my station, I am the best in what I do. Surely they will understand."

"These are disgustingly rich, worthless demons, my lord. They don't care if you're the best in anythingâ€"I certainly understandâ€"but these fools are so thick-headed..."

"Either way I am here and invited. I won't snub such an invitation after everything else. Besides, I should like to see the Prinnies at work up close."

Once Valvatorez had an idea in his head it was hard to deter him. Fenrich silently weighed his options for the moment. It was clear he wouldn't be heard straight on like this; he had to manipulate things in his favor. With a little work perhaps it could be done...

"Very well...All is for my lord," Fenrich said, bowing slightly. He could manage such a small task.

Valvatorez flashed Fenrich a brilliant smile before taking off to wander about the ballroom and keep an eye on his student Prinnies. He wasn't directly engaging in conversation at least. That give Fenrich some time to get to workâ€"calling up one of the Prinnies they'd brought from home and beginning to execute things as he saw fit.

The first demon to approach Valvatorez was suddenly taken by a fit of coughing and hurried off.

The next met with a table in such an unlikely manner that he crashed head first into itâ€"ultimately resulting in an ugly knock out. The Prinnies saw to getting the body out of the way.

Another demon crushed under a chandelier.

A few passed out with their drinks still half-finished in their claws.

Demons dropped like flies from all sorts of ailments the second they came within a certain radius of the small vampire. He did not seem to notice he was the cause--only that these were very weak demons to be falling prey to such things. Typical demons really.

Fenrich appeared just very slightly frazzled, but he was managing. No demon got too close to asking for Valvatorez's anything before meeting a nasty end of some sort. Well perhaps not death if they were lucky.

It didn't take long for Gunnar and his butler to notice however. By the time the hall was emptied by half from accidents the demon lord stomped up to Valvatorez with rage in his eyes. "What are you all doing to my guests? This has to be your fault!"

The vampire gave him a puzzled look. "What am I doing? What are you doing knowing so many demons with such a weak constitution? They're quite pitiful."

This only served to make the demon angrier. "Don't play dumb with me!"

"I wouldn't dream of playing with you in any way. Not in ten thousand years. I have better things to do. I'm simply overseeing the Prinnies and enjoying your party--as requested."

Fenrich couldn't help but grin. Not the best phrasing, but at least Val had no idea. He was safe for now. It seemed it was too obvious--even from across the room. Gunnar caught him.

"What's so funny, werewolf?! This is your doing then?" Gunnar shouted at him.

"I don't have the faintest idea. Perhaps you're having a bit of bad luck? What is it humans say? Something about karma?" Fenrich said off-handedly, very much playing dumb.

"I didn't ask about humans, I'm asking about what you did!"

Valvatorez piped in first. "I think perhaps you meant humans. Especially if you're talking about playing dumb. They take part in all sorts of dumb play. Perhaps this is a goal of yours to share in this, Gunnar. You certainly look like the type that might be interested in humans. It is a strange choice, but I support you nonetheless. Go out there and achieve. I'm sure you can do it," the vampire near whispered with such conviction all around would be forced to believe it. Or at least believe that Valvatorez honestly believed it. Another of his finest qualities.

It still left Fenrich almost snickering as the confused demon lord looked between them and his dwindling number of guests. In the brief silence another demon dropped from too much alcohol--or something like that.

Some started to ease their way out fearing some sort of curse on this place. It only served to increase Gunnar's anger.

"Oh I see how this is...Humiliate me in my own castle would you? You know you'll pay dearly..."

"You should bring this up with your guests. They are really poorly behaved," Valvatorez answered with a calm ease. He didn't seem to understand the threat might have been directed his way.

While Fenrich enjoyed his lord's confidence here it was not going to pan out well if this many demons turned on them at once. Maybe ages ago it would have been fine, but now he was not entirely sure how much Valvatorez could handle. Then again if he offered him his own blood when things got tight or at least looked that way...

He stayed his hand for now.

A few more demons squeezed through the doors. Others lingered, waiting to see a fight unfold. Considering the way Gunnar stood at the ready and the way the air swirled around the room they weren't guessing wrong. Fenrich eyed the situation. He wasn't that strongâ€"this would work.

Fenrich took a few steps from around the tableâ€"just a couple paces closer to his lord. He could afford some caution.

"You've been mocking me the entire time you've been here, Prinny Instructor. I think someone needs to knock you down a few pegs," Gunnar decided, spoken through near gritted teeth. In a few seconds the bigger demon handled his massive ax between two hands, the weapon pointed toward Valvatorez who did not look alarmed.

"I've done no such thing, but I don't suppose you'll be listening anymore now that you've drawn that thing," the vampire said casually. Fenrich knew he'd be avoiding going for his blade if he could get away with it. Val would say something about noble pride, but Fenrich also knew it'd piss off Gunnar even more. The nonchalance of his reaction already did so.

"You're the one supposed to be getting played here! Stop playing games with me! You're no Tyrant anymore!"

"I suppose that I am not. I'm merely a Prinny instructor. I did ask you requested. I don't see any reason to fight with you now."

"And starting a fight at your own party? Have you no tact?" Fenrich chirped in, looking positively tickled with these results. It was good to see the ass all frustrated and unable to argue Lord Val's impeccable logic.

"The both of you!" Gunnar spat out. His butler ghost was at his side in a second, looking prepared to back him up.

It was only fair that Fenrich strolled over to join his lord. He loosened his tie and grinned. "What a temper. Some demon lord you are."

"Yes, which rock did you crawl from under? You have nothing about you

that invites the picture of 'demon lord.' You should be most ashamed."

Gunnar snarled and swung his ax at the pair, both ducked back and out of the way. "How could the both of you forget?! My mercenary company! The one you two obliterated! Do you have any idea how much Hell you set me back?!"

Fenrich thought for a moment. That did all seem to add up after all. It must have slipped his mind after all these years.

"Which? They must not have been very strong if I don't recall them. Surely that is no big loss," Valvatorez said perhaps as harshly as Fenrich would have, but his tone betrayed that he perhaps really did just forget those so underneath himself. His lord's selective memory never stopped being splendid.

Gunnar only snapped again and swung once more. Both were small enough to dodge around the edge of the ax easily enough but perhaps all that sparkling armor of Gunnar's might get in the way of taking him down. In a moment the ghostly butler supplied his master with a backing of magic to keep the pair in motion.

"Well Fenrich, shall I handle one and you the other?"

As Valvatorez said this, of course other demons started to pile inâ€"either so drunk they were eager or perhaps they were just the violent sort. Either way, a wall of new challengers stood between them and the door.

"Maybe focus on getting out of this in one piece. Whoever takes who is fine," Fenrich supplied before punching back a drunkard with bad aim. At least some of these were serious light-weights. And he might have poisoned some of the rest already anyway.

"Very reasonable of you! So it will be done! Watch my back," Valvatorez said, using a bit of magic to draw forth his blade and smash it into an on-comer. It stopped them at leastâ€"much to the werewolf's relief.

"My lord don't push yourself!" he called out to him, but already Valvatorez took on challengers like nothing had changed. Perhaps neither wanted to admit to any difference. Still, Fenrich knew he had to push himself to keep the both of them safe. He tore into enemies head onâ€"taking a second to put the butler out of commission with a little extra magic and muscle. It was better than letting his lord be peppered with weak magic like this.

Gunnar however seemed to have worked himself into enough of a rage that he would not be put down so easily. Valvatorez dodged him well enough, but struggled to get a good hit in. Fenrich kept Val's back clear for the time being; however, dealing with the head on threat became more and more pressing as attacks turned wilder and stronger. Idiot or no, the demon had at least some sort of strength. But he was fueled by weak ambitionâ€"Fenrich knew he would fall one way or another.

It wasn't a bad time to enact his plan. With the backlog of enemies cleared Fenrich could step into the fray with his master. He let himself appear more worn than he truly wasâ€"pushing to face more

attacks than Valvatorez would. A worried call of his name came from the vampire soon enough as the ax grazed over Fenrich's midsection—"tearing up the nice waistcoat. Fenrich stumbled back, breathing hard. "My lord...!"

This was met with another call of the werewolf's name and Valvatorez rushing to his side to help support him. "Fenrich, don't be a fool and get yourself killed! If you're tired, leave this to me. You rest here while I stop this monster," he said urgently. That seriousness brought a small ache to Fenrich's chest. It was still moving to be so cared for. He wanted to linger longer here with his lord's arm around him, his hand moving for his own and their fingers weaved together. A piece of him melted into the brief moment—"soaking up the unbelievable honesty and wonder of his dear lord.

"Lord Val...please," he began, remembering he had a task. "If I cannot do it then surely you will struggle to...Please, my lord. Regain some of your strength. With my blood..."

Valvatorez tensed, holding Fenrich's hand tighter. "No Fenrich! I can't! I made a promise! Regardless of what you think my strength is at, I will defend you to my very last breath if I must. But fear not! I will not lose here," he said, a sureness in his gaze that reminded Fenrich so very much of the fateful day his lord came to his rescue and saved his life. He was an unmatched and wonderful demon.

"My lord, I wouldn't beg..."

"Then do not! Trust in my ability to protect you instead! As my most important vassal and comrade...the demon I trust the most, trust in me in return!"

Trust did not necessarily stop a mad demon but somehow Valvatorez's voice proved difficult to argue with. "Y...yes my lord..."

With that settled Valvatorez loosened his grip and stood to face the raging Gunnar again. The event hall was about smashed to pieces and littered with bodies—"the only threat left was this single demon. One totally out of his mind demon. The ax came crashing down, leaving a gaping wound in the tiled floor but Valvatorez unscathed. The smaller demon jumped into action—"blade at the ready as he sailed over the ax. Gunnar snapped it upward to try and stop him, but he simply bounded off the long handle of the weapon and dropped his sword into Gunnar's unarmored skull. It sent the demon wheeling back and bleeding—"shouting incoherently and cursing the both of them at the same time. Fenrich stared in awe.

All of that and somehow Valvatorez stopped this bastard. The demon was fueled on nothing but his own willpower. Fenrich forgot that sometimes. A power of Valvatorez's so formidable that no one could anticipate it. Truly, he was the demon of his dreams.

Calm and casual as ever, Valvatorez turned back to Fenrich and helped him remain steady. "I believe it is about time we returned home," he said.

Fenrich struggled with words to even reply with at first. "I...yes...But are you sure, my lord? We could remain a bit longer...sort out this fool...take some spoils of battle back? Anything...?" Anything but returning to Hades after all

this.

Valvatorez shook his head. "No. Unfortunately Fenrich there are more Prinnies waiting on me. And remaining up here seems to invite more trouble than I care to deal with knowing they are waiting for me."

Of course he would say so. Fenrich sighed and straightened himself out. "...Very well...as you would have it."

"Your understanding and patience is appreciated, Fenrich. Thank you for supporting me," he answered earnestly.

It left the werewolf a touch flustered. "...I wouldn't dream of doing anything else." Valvatorez' penchant for actually thanking him was still something Fenrich had to work through. His kindness felt so honest, what else could he say? Well, there was one more thing.

"...I would not mind if you invited more trouble, my lord. Together we could tackle it."

For once Valvatorez paused. Something in his eyes signaled he perhaps actually considered it. "I have my duty, Fenrich. If it displeases you to remain in Hades then...perhaps you have things to consider instead." With that the vampire took off for the doors to leave. Fenrich blurted his name and chased after himâ€"catching up quickly and speaking faster.

"My lord, I meant no such thing! I simply wish to see you thriving!"

"Then see me do so in my work. I put my all into it. If that is not enough I will simply do more."

"You do more than enough of that, but you..."

Fenrich stopped himself, looking at the way Val's gaze was fixed forward as he walked onward. Something so slight as this would not change his lord's mind. Frustration tested his patience but he knew. To push Valvatorez now would only make him more stubborn in staying. "My apologies my lord...All that I do, I do with you in mind."

"I understand, Fenrich. I know you're thinking of me, but consider my work below important to me as well. I am fine spending my days doing such vital work with you at my side. Think of this as well."

Whenever he put it like that Fenrich couldn't fight him. They both slowed their pace to a more casual one, Fenrich taking up his usual place walking at his lord's side. "It will remain on my mind. My lord's patience with me is inspiring..."

"For you Fenrich, it is endless."

They walked a few inches closer together, hands almost meeting. "Then mine for you will be the same."

They exchanged a pair of more easy-going looks and carried on back home in better spirits. Fenrich didn't appreciate the trip back down

but he would put up with it. He would put up with much for his lordâ€"he could afford that much.

When they returned to Hades things settled down to much of what it had been since their initial arrival. Fenrich saw to his lord's needs and needled for his desires to take it that step further. He saw no point in completely accepting this lifeâ€"Valvatorez was still above all of this; however, he would wait. The right moment would strike, the pieces would fall into place and he could more easily urge his lord out of this state. Until that time he would be unfailingly at his side. That he even enjoyed that spot reserved just for him, he would not easily say. But when Valvatorez would give him thanks or simply chatter with him the days slipped by. Hades was not the complete agony he took it for.

If it were Valvatorez's side he were at, perhaps he could wait any time needed of him. Not passively, not without plotting and not without nudging Lord Val along, but Fenrich could remain close. Maybe even happily.

End  
file.